

Help - my job market is shrinking!

With growing professional experience, you may know the unsettling feeling when you realise there are fewer roles that truly fit you. At the start of your career, as a blank slate, the world seemed full of open doors. Years later, many of those doors appear to have closed. Faced with this, many people react out of fear – and often choose a fatal strategy.

Peter Näf

One of my clients – let's call him Markus – had an interesting and highly specialised professional background. After a technical degree and several years in industry, he most recently worked as a management consultant in his field. Following a career break, he came to me for a self-financed outplacement programme to redefine his direction and search for a new role.

We conducted a personal and professional assessment and identified possible job profiles. When Markus began his job search, he was shocked: compared to earlier years, his job market had clearly shrunk. There were only a handful of roles matching his specialised profile. What to do? Like many in a similar situation, he tried to expand his market again.

There's no going back

He broadened his search to include positions he could have applied for five or ten years earlier. This gave him access to the largest possible job market – which initially felt reassuring. But I warned him against this strategy.

While he could now apply for more roles, he was overqualified for most of them – and accordingly received rejections. Overqualification is one

of the hardest topics to address in my coaching practice (see my article “7 times in the last round, 7 times a rejection”). Intuitively, widening one's search radius seems safer, but in doing so, candidates place themselves among the large mass of generic applicants.

A more successful strategy takes the opposite approach – and may feel uncomfortable at first: sharpen your target profile so that you fit perfectly within your smaller segment of the market. Apply only for positions that genuinely require your seniority and depth of experience.

Small is beautiful

Professionals with many years of experience are no longer universal keys, but rather complex ones that open only select doors. So, take heart and accept that your job market will become narrower over time. Comfort yourself with the thought that most of the disappearing opportunities would not have interested you anyway.

From a generational perspective, it would hardly be fair if seasoned specialists competed with younger professionals for their roles – depriving them of the chance to gain the same depth of expertise and maturity.

With patience, Markus eventually found a role that genuinely interested him – and for which he was perfectly qualified. It wasn't even his only option. His small job market turned out to be large enough after all.

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